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# The Family and Regionality in Early Modern Southwest Sea Villages: Questioning the Start of Japan's Modernity from a Historical Demography Perspective

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The Family and Regionality in Early Modern Southwest Sea Villages:  
Questioning the Start of Japan's Modernity from a Historical Demography Perspective

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This publication, using historical demography methods, analyzes the case of villages in southwest Japan with regard to changes in and continuation of regional diversity of populations and families in the Tokugawa Era. This book has three objectives. The first is to conduct an adjustment and update of the southwest Japan region, one of the three regional categories in Japan's historical demography (comprising northeast Japan, central Japan, and southwest Japan). The second objective is to question whether or not the regional diversity of populations and families at the time of transition to the modern era was standardized. The third objective is to ascertain the latest time at which regionality can still be observed in populations and families.

The subject analyzed in this book is Nomo Village, Sonogi-gun, Hizen no Kuni (present-day Nomomachi, Nagasaki City). Nomo Village is a hamlet that is bordered by the sea on three sides where the main industry is fishing. However, Nomo Village also made major contributions to establishment of southwest Japan historical demography. In this publication, we look at how the people who lived in this village experienced their “life courses” in the Tokugawa Era.

The Shumon Aratame Cho (Register of Religious Faith and Relationships) used as the data source for this publication is a historical document that was used to survey people's faith and to verify which temples they were affiliated with, based on the Tokugawa Shogunate policy of banning Christianity. In the Shumon Aratame Cho, matters such as name, age, position in the family, and affiliated temple at the time of the survey were recorded. Also, in Nagasaki, including in Nomo Village, compilation of the Shumon Aratame Cho was related to the act called “e-bumi,” in which people were required to stamp on an image of Christ or the Virgin Mary on a wooden or bronze tablet, to prove that they were not Christians. In Nomo Village, the Shumon Aratame Cho records from 1766 through 1871 still exist and, based on these historical materials, this publication clarifies the population, family, and village society in the period from the later early modern era to the time of transition to the modern era.

The Tokugawa Era had considerable regional diversity in terms of population and family life. In particular, there was considerable regional diversity in regard to marriage, and historical demography has shown that northeast Japan had early marriages, while southwest Japan featured later marriages. For example, in the Tokugawa Era, the average age for first marriage in villages in

northeast Japan was an early 19.0 years for boys and 14.2 years for girls. In contrast, the average age for first marriage in Nomo Village was 31.1 years for men and 25.0 years for women; these are late ages for marriage which are not much different from current standards. In Nomo Village, with its late marriage age, the prevailing marriage pattern was to use the birth of the first child as an opportunity to register the marriage in the Shumon Aratame Cho. In other words, a feature of marriage in Nomo Village was that, before registration of a couple as married, in the Shumon Aratame Cho, there was a period allowed for a relationship or trial marriage, and this pre-registration period was the reason for the late marriage ages.

The regionality of marriage age identified through historical demography was observed not only in the Tokugawa Era but also in the Meiji Era, and thus was considered to have been an enduring practice. However, when it came to the middle of the 19th century, the average age of first marriage of girls in the northeast region, which was known for its early marriages, increased, while in Nomo Village with its late marriages, in the same period, the average age of first marriage for boys was decreasing. At the stage of transition to modern times, although the relative status of northeast Japan having early marriages and southwest Japan having late marriages did not change, diversity in terms regional differences in marriage age became less. Also, the marriage pattern for Nomo Village, where a couple was registered as married on the occasion of the birth of their first child, which was the origin of late marriages, also changed in the time of transition to the modern era to a marriage pattern whereby the couple were registered as married prior to the birth of their first child. We can interpret this as a change from a marriage pattern based on regional diversity to a “standardized marriage pattern.”

In the time of transition to the modern era, a convergence and standardization of the regionality of population and family took place. Moreover, this development occurred before the Meiji Restoration, and there is a possibility that the wave of modernization hit Japan earlier than we have previously supposed. In addition, the fact that standardization arose out of people's daily lives, such as in marriage and divorce, was an important discovery in respect of reconsidering the modernization of Japan.

Given the above, there is a question as to whether aspects of regional diversity in relation to population and family were all immediately swept away as a result of the standardization that occurred in the second half of the 19th century. At the end of this publication, in order to address this question, the proportion of spouses that had not been registered in the 1940 National Census was calculated by prefecture and it became clear that, the further west one looked, the more common was non-registration of marriages, while the further east, the fewer non-registered marriages. In other

words, the folk custom of submitting a notification of marriage upon the birth of a child, and its regionality, remained in place at least until the early Showa Period. Also, from interview surveys, it became clear that, in Nomo Village in the first part of Showa, a marriage pattern called “susō-ire” existed. Susō-ire referred to a marriage in which two people were recognized in a village as a conjugal couple in a village, regardless of whether or not they had taken part in a formal wedding ceremony, or even submitted a marriage notification. The regionality of population and family that was supported by these kinds of folk customs was not suddenly or entirely swept away in the latter part of the 19th century; rather, it continued until at least the early part of Showa.

For this publication, the regional diversity of population and family in the Tokugawa Era was analyzed using historical demography methods, and it was found that this regionality converged at the start of the modern era. In other words, in the transition to modern times, regions that were imbued with diversity took different paths and came close to “the standard.” However, this publication clearly shows that regional diversity was not completely subsumed by “the standard” but, in fact, continued, supported by the people who lived in those regions.